

Literature Relating to S.I.

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- Review of*
- 1. Letters, Diary and Poems of A. Seeger.  
2. ^ Juniperus Communis on L.I. & S.I.  
3. Catskill Water Supply  
4. Catskill Aqueduct Celebration  
5. English Crown Grants  
6. Petition and Protest re. Riparian Grants  
7. The Coursen (Corson) family  
8. Early History of S.I.

BOX III



## Literature Relating to Staten Island

### LETTERS AND DIARY,<sup>1</sup> AND POEMS<sup>2</sup> OF ALAN SEEGER

Alan Seeger was born in New York June 22, 1888, joined the Foreign Legion of France in September 1914, at the outbreak of the European war, and was killed in action on the battlefield of Belloy-en-Santerre July 4, 1916. He had, therefore, only just passed his twenty-ninth birthday when he met his death.

During the first ten years of his life he resided on Staten Island and is remembered by many of us, especially, no doubt, by those who were his fellow students at the Staten Island Academy. He may, therefore, be included among our local literati, even though his literary work was all accomplished after his departure from our island.

A short account of the life of the author, and comments on the literary merits of his writings may be found in the volume of poems, in the introduction written by William Archer. Whether it was heredity or environment that was the most important factor in influencing the mental and the resultant physical activities of Alan Seeger would be merely a matter of inference. Archer says, in commenting on the Seeger family residence, which was on Fort Hill: "From their home on the heights of Staten Island the children looked out day by day upon one of the most romantic scenes in the world—the gateway to the Western Hemisphere. . . . In the foreground lay Robbin's Reef Lighthouse, in the middle distance the Statue of Liberty, in the background the giant curves of Brooklyn Bridge, and, range over range, the mountainous buildings of 'downtown' New York

<sup>1</sup> Letters and Diary | of | Alan Seeger | New York | Charles Scribner's Sons | 1917. 8° cloth, 218 p., *frontispiece portrait of the author.*

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. . . and the incoming stream of tramps and liners met the outgoing stream which carried the imagination seaward, to the islands of the buccaneers, and the haunts of all the heroes and villains of history, in the old world. The children did not look with incurious eyes upon this stirring scene . . . the walls of their nursery were covered with their drawings of the shipping. . . . They were of an age, before they left Staten Island, to realize something of the historic implications of their environment."

One feature, at least, of his early surroundings left its impress upon his memory, and we find it embodied in the poem entitled *The Old Lowe House, Staten Island*, which we infer to mean the old Daniel Low mansion, located close to where he lived and with which he must have been familiar:

. . . Relic of a romantic taste gone by,  
 This stately monument alone remains,  
 Vacant, with lichened walls, and window panes  
 Blank as the windows of a skull. But I,  
 On evenings when autumnal winds have stirred  
 In the porch vines, to this gray oracle  
 Have laid a wondering ear and oft times heard,  
 As from the hollow of a stranded shell,  
 Old voices echoing (or my fancy erred)  
 Things indistinct but not insensible.

The literary merits of Seeger's writings have been discussed by others more competent for the work than the reviewer. To the reviewer the interest attaching to his writings is not concerned with the features which enlist the attention of the literary critic—the choice of words or phrases, or the rhythm of verses—but in what they reveal or indicate of the underlying mental processes—the ideas, impulses and convictions of the author—of which his writings are the outward expression.

Alan Seeger was an evolutionist and a fatalist. He was evidently a firm believer in the doctrine that "whatever *is* is right," because everything that happens is foreordained and inevitable. This mental attitude is well expressed in his poem *The Hosts*:

. . . Let idlers argue the right and wrong  
 And weigh what merit our causes had.  
 Putting our faith in being strong—  
 Above the level of good and bad—  
 For us, we battled and burned and killed  
 Because evolving Nature willed,  
 And it was our pride and boast to be  
 The instruments of Destiny. . . .

And again, in Maktoob:

. . . Within the book of Destiny,  
 Whose leaves are Time, whose cover, Space,  
 The day when you shall cease to be,  
 The hour, the mode, the place,

Are marked, they say; and you shall not  
 By taking thought or using wit  
 Alter that certain fate one jot,  
 Postpone or conjure it.

Learn to drive fear, then, from your heart.  
 If you must perish, know O man,  
 'Tis an inevitable part  
 Of the predestined plan. . . .

Many of his poems show a passionate love of life and all its pleasures, verging upon the sensuous at times, in the frank exuberance of his youth, as when he says:

. . . What is so fair as lovers in their joy  
 That dies in sleep, their sleep that wakes in joy?  
 Caressing arms are their light pillows. They  
 That like lost stars have wandered hitherto  
 Lonesome and lightless through the universe,  
 Now glow transpired at Nature's flaming core;  
 They are the center; constellated heaven  
 Is the embroidered panoply spread round  
 Their bridal, and the music of the spheres  
 Rocks them in hushed epithalamium.  
 . . . I ask nought else  
 Than réincarnate to retrace my path,  
 Be born again of woman, walk once more  
 Through Childhood's fragrant, flowing wonderland

And, entered in the golden realm of Youth,  
 Fare still a pilgrim toward the copious joys  
 I savored here, yet scarce began to sip. . . .

Coincidentally, however, his fatalism made him absolutely contemptuous of death, without any affectation of self-sacrifice or any marring trace of mock heroism.

Each of these dominant mental characteristics is well exemplified in his already widely known poem, *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*:

I have a rendezvous with Death  
 At some disputed barricade,  
 When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
 And apple blossoms fill the air—  
 I have a rendezvous with Death  
 When Spring brings back blue days and fair. . . .  
 God knows 'twere better to be deep  
 Pillowed in silk and scented down  
 Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
 Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,  
 Where hushed awakenings are dear.  
 But I've a rendezvous with Death  
 At midnight in some flaming town,  
 When Spring trips north again this year,  
 And I to my pledged word am true,  
 I shall not fail that rendezvous.

A. H.

#### JUNIPERUS COMMUNIS ON LONG ISLAND AND STATEN ISLAND\*

This is a concise account of the former and present known localities for the juniper, *Juniperus communis* L., on Long Island and Staten Island. On our island the species, to the best of our knowledge, became extinct on the death, about 1892, of the last of the few individuals that formerly grew in the grove of cedar trees, *Juniperus virginiana* L., along the beach near New Dorp.

It is interesting to note that on Long Island there are recorded several widely separated stations where specimens of this locally rare tree are growing.

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\* Wm. T. Davis. *Torreyana* 17: 99, f. 1. June 1917.

CATSKILL WATER SUPPLY<sup>4</sup>

From whence, exactly, do we get our present main water supply on Staten Island, and how is it delivered to us? Many official reports, popular articles and newspaper accounts dealing with this subject have been published during the past decade; but none contains clearer and more concise descriptions, more complete statistical data, and better selected illustrations than may be found included in this neatly printed, well illustrated, and popularly written pamphlet.

The course of the water may be traced on the map through portions of ten counties, from the Schoharie drainage basin, 120 miles distant from us to the Ashokan reservoir, and thence by the great aqueduct to its terminus in the Silver Lake reservoir. The elevation of the former is 590 feet above tide level and that of the latter 228 feet. The water, therefore, comes to us by gravity, and it takes about three days to make the journey, passing in its travels four times beneath the lower Hudson River and its confluences: the Harlem River, the East River, and New York Bay.

The illustrations of local interest are (p. 6) a view of Silver Lake reservoir, filled with water, looking south from the northeast end; (p. 12) sections of the north dike and basin and south dike and basin of the same reservoir; (p. 64) sectional view, showing the method of laying the connecting siphon from Long Island to Staten Island under the waters of New York Bay.

In brief, this is an interesting little municipal handbook of information, containing facts and figures with which every citizen of Greater New York should be familiar as a matter of civic pride, if for no other reason.

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CATSKILL AQUEDUCT CELEBRATION PUBLICATIONS<sup>5</sup>

This neatly bound volume consists of the descriptive catalogs and pamphlets issued by twelve of the Greater New York organizations and institutions that prepared and installed exhibitions in connection with and on request of the Mayor's Catskill Aqueduct Celebration Committee.

The catalog of our museum exhibits, although it includes but four pages, compares very favorably, in so far as its contents are concerned, with its companions. Two features, especially, which can hardly fail to be noted, are that each and all of our exhibits were strictly pertinent to the occasion, and that they were replete with local interest and significance.

One item worthy of particular attention is in reference to the old wooden water mains of Manhattan. Sections of these were included in several of the exhibits, but our specimen was the only one in which the kind of wood from which it was made was definitely determined. The original specifications in regard to these mains provided that "these logs must be of good pitch pine."<sup>6</sup> Whether or not this meant *Pinus rigida* Mill., which is the species popularly known as pitch pine today, we do not know; but we do know that the particular log in our possession is *Pinus Strobus* L., or white pine;<sup>7</sup> from which it may be argued that there are certain advantages in a museum which combines both historical and scientific research in its activities.

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<sup>6</sup> New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury, Sep. 5, 1774, *vide* New York Hist. Soc. Bull. 1: 64. Oct. 1917.

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find references to practically everything that has been published on the subject in the list of twenty-nine works and articles in the library of our museum, mentioned under item No. 13 of our Aqueduct Celebration catalog of exhibits.

A. H.

#### ENGLISH CROWN GRANTS<sup>8</sup>

This little volume was written with an avowed object in view that is outlined in the "Foreword" and is discussed in its various aspects in the subsequent chapters. In the former it is stated that "the American bar associations, historical societies, colonial organizations, and all thoughtful citizens have vital interest in the unique history and present-day dominating influence, in America, of the old English crown grants. . . . The English crown grants of lands on Staten Island have been selected by the author as the most diversified, yet favorable grouping of grants to illustrate the discussion of the problems involved."

Pages 27-53 include a presentation and discussion of facts and claims in relation to the crown grants of land on Staten Island; but, in order to thoroughly understand the points involved, the author's previous work, *The Major and the Queen*,<sup>9</sup> should be read first. The crux of the discussion may be inferred from the statement that "the records of the state of New York . . . disclose a large number of crown grants of Staten Island lands, issued to various parties. These grants, exclusive of the last and final grant, were originally intended to cover about one half of Staten Island. The last, final and inclusive grant, issued to Lancaster Symes, covered all of the remaining lands on Staten Island,

<sup>8</sup> English Crown Grants | by | S. L. Mershon | Member of | The National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C. . . . Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences; etc. | Author of | *The Major and The Queen* | The Foundation of Colonial Land Titles | under English Common Law | New York | The Law and History Club | Publishers, 39 Cortlandt Street. 12<sup>m</sup>o cloth, 266 p, copyright, 1918, by S. L. Mershon.

<sup>9</sup> R. H. Beam & Co., publishers, New York, 1915. Reviewed in *PROC. STATEN IS. ASSOC. ARTS AND SCI.* 6<sup>2</sup>: 152.

together with various rights appertaining thereto and at the time belonging to the English crown. . . .”

All legal rights and title to these lands were claimed by the Symes Foundation, by and from whom they were transferred to the Lancaster Symes Estate on Staten Island.

Pages 236-266 include a chapter on the Symes Foundation and the Lancaster Symes Estate. The matter included in this chapter was also printed in legal form as a separate publication under date of July 2, 1917, and more or less widely distributed. We do not pretend to any knowledge in regard to what that august entity, The Law, may think of the claims embodied in the legal instruments that are given verbatim in this chapter; but they are interesting to any student of local history; and optimists, pessimists, or plain ordinary skeptics will find in them inspiration for expressions of opinion in regard to the apparent altruism that influenced those whose signatures are attached to and whose names occur in connection with the instruments mentioned.

The volume is replete with historical facts; and the special facts, discussions and arguments in relation to the grant of lands on Staten Island to Major Lancaster Symes by Queen Anne may be found in two chapters, one on under-sea lands and land grants and one on an analysis of the Symes grant, on pages 129-135 and 182-202, respectively. The latter is of special interest to the lay reader as an example of the course of reasoning employed by the members of the legal profession in the interpretation of the assumed intent and meaning of words and phrases.

A. H.

#### PETITION AND PROTEST IN REGARD TO RIPARIAN GRANTS ETC. ON STATEN ISLAND<sup>10</sup>

This is a document, printed in legal form, “in the matter of Riparian Grants by the State of New York to lands on Staten

<sup>10</sup> State of New York | Petition | and | Protest | to | The Honorable Francis M. Hugo | Secretary of State, Albany, N. Y. | by | S. L. Mershon. Pamph. roy. 8°, 15 p. Mar. 25, 1918.

Island, *also* Leases by the State of New York of submerged lands in the waters of Staten Island." In particular it is an argument on behalf of the claims and objects of the much discussed Symes Foundation.

Of especial interest to us is the fact that the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences is specifically designated as one of the proposed beneficiaries in the event of the objects of the Foundation being accomplished.

This document may be regarded as an appendix or a sequel to the work previously reviewed.

A. H.

#### THE COURSEN (CORSON) FAMILY<sup>11</sup>

This is a genealogical record, together with copies of grants, wills, and other instruments in connection with which the Coursen (or Corson) family was concerned. The plates include a portrait of the author, a picture of his residence at Huguenot Park, Staten Island, and a reproduction of an old sketch of Manhattan Island made about 1650.

The genealogical records begin with "Peter Coursen the first French Huguenot Emigrant from France to New Amsterdam in 1612," and ends with the issue of Cornelius Corson 7th, who died in 1900.

The author notes as a peculiar coincidence, that Arendt Coursen, in 1642, gave a power of attorney to one Covert Lookerman (whose family name was subsequently changed to Lookman and finally to Lockman) the direct ancestor of Samuel Lockman, the great great grandfather of the author, whose daughter Henrietta Maria married Richard Corson in 1820.

A. H.

<sup>11</sup> The Coursens | From 1612 to 1917, compiled from Ancient and Modern Records, with the Staten Island Branch | By | Percival Glenroy Ullman. 8° cloth, 88 p. 3 pl. No date or place of publication.

EARLY HISTORY OF STATEN ISLAND<sup>12</sup>

This modest brochure bears several evidences of haste or carelessness in its preparation. On the cover the title appears as "A Short History of Staten Island"; but the title page designates the work as "Early History of Staten Island," while in his kindly letter of transmittal the author refers to it under the title first mentioned; so that the question is an open one in regard to the title under which it should be catalogued and cited.

It is fittingly dedicated to Mr. Ira K. Morris, "whose history of Staten Island has endeared him to all those who love Staten Island, and whose indefatigable and painstaking historical researches of many years have challenged the admiration of those interested in the history of our Island." This dedication is dated May 1918, which we may, therefore, assume to be approximately the date of publication, although it does not appear on the title page.

The author states, in the introduction, that "the desire to awaken in the hearts of the growing generations of Staten Islanders an interest and a love for their native island have induced the writer to present this short history."

It is, frankly, a compilation of such events and incidents, gleaned from general sources of information, as the author deemed to be of special interest or significance. It is unfortunate, however, that dates are omitted in connection with many events of importance, thus detracting from their main historic value and interest. The absence of pagination numbers is also a drawback, so far as ease and accuracy of reference and citation is concerned.

A. H.

<sup>12</sup> Early | History | of | Staten Island | By | Cornelius G. Kolff. 8° pamph. 32 p. May 1918(?).





[Reprinted from PROCEEDINGS OF THE STATEN ISLAND ASSOCIATION OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, Vol. VII., October, 1917-May, 1918.]

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It is interesting to note that on Long Island there are recorded several widely separated stations where specimens of this locally rare tree are growing.

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Pages 27-53 include a presentation and discussion of facts and claims in relation to the crown grants of land on Staten Island; but, in order to thoroughly understand the points involved, the author's previous work, *The Major and the Queen*,<sup>9</sup> should be read first. The crux of the discussion may be inferred from the statement that "the records of the state of New York . . . disclose a large number of crown grants of Staten Island lands, issued to various parties. These grants, exclusive of the last and final grant, were originally intended to cover about one half of Staten Island. The last, final and inclusive grant, issued to Lancaster Symes, covered all of the remaining lands on Staten Island,

<sup>8</sup> English Crown Grants | by | S. L. Mershon | Member of | The National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C. . . . Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences; etc. | Author of | *The Major and The Queen* | *The Foundation of Colonial Land Titles* | under English Common Law | New York | The Law and History Club | Publishers, 39 Cortlandt Street. 12<sup>mo</sup> cloth, 266 p, copyright, 1918, by S. L. Mershon.

<sup>9</sup> R. H. Beam & Co., publishers, New York, 1915. Reviewed in *PROC. STATEN IS. ASSOC. ARTS AND SCI.* 6<sup>2</sup>: 152.

together with various rights appertaining thereto and at the time belonging to the English crown. . . .”

All legal rights and title to these lands were claimed by the Symes Foundation, by and from whom they were transferred to the Lancaster Symes Estate on Staten Island.

Pages 236–266 include a chapter on the Symes Foundation and the Lancaster Symes Estate. The matter included in this chapter was also printed in legal form as a separate publication under date of July 2, 1917, and more or less widely distributed. We do not pretend to any knowledge in regard to what that august entity, The Law, may think of the claims embodied in the legal instruments that are given verbatim in this chapter; but they are interesting to any student of local history; and optimists, pessimists, or plain ordinary skeptics will find in them inspiration for expressions of opinion in regard to the apparent altruism that influenced those whose signatures are attached to and whose names occur in connection with the instruments mentioned.

The volume is replete with historical facts; and the special facts, discussions and arguments in relation to the grant of lands on Staten Island to Major Lancaster Symes by Queen Anne may be found in two chapters, one on under-sea lands and land grants and one on an analysis of the Symes grant, on pages 129–135 and 182–202, respectively. The latter is of special interest to the lay reader as an example of the course of reasoning employed by the members of the legal profession in the interpretation of the assumed intent and meaning of words and phrases.

A. H.

#### PETITION AND PROTEST IN REGARD TO RIPARIAN GRANTS ETC. ON STATEN ISLAND<sup>10</sup>

This is a document, printed in legal form, “in the matter of Riparian Grants by the State of New York to lands on Staten

<sup>10</sup> State of New York | Petition | and | Protest | to | The Honorable Francis M. Hugo | Secretary of State, Albany, N. Y. | by | S. L. Mershon. Pamph. roy. 8°, 15 p. Mar. 25, 1918.

Island, *also* Leases by the State of New York of submerged lands in the waters of Staten Island." In particular it is an argument on behalf of the claims and objects of the much discussed Symes Foundation.

Of especial interest to us is the fact that the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences is specifically designated as one of the proposed beneficiaries in the event of the objects of the Foundation being accomplished.

This document may be regarded as an appendix or a sequel to the work previously reviewed.

A. H.

#### THE COURSEN (CORSON) FAMILY<sup>11</sup>

This is a genealogical record, together with copies of grants, wills, and other instruments in connection with which the Coursen (or Corson) family was concerned. The plates include a portrait of the author, a picture of his residence at Huguenot Park, Staten Island, and a reproduction of an old sketch of Manhattan Island made about 1650.

The genealogical records begin with "Peter Coursen the first French Huguenot Emigrant from France to New Amsterdam in 1612," and ends with the issue of Cornelius Corson 7th, who died in 1900.

The author notes as a peculiar coincidence, that Arendt Coursen, in 1642, gave a power of attorney to one Covert Lookerman (whose family name was subsequently changed to Lookman and finally to Lockman) the direct ancestor of Samuel Lockman, the great great grandfather of the author, whose daughter Henrietta Maria married Richard Corson in 1820.

A. H.

<sup>11</sup> The Coursens | From 1612 to 1917, compiled from Ancient and Modern Records, with the Staten Island Branch | By | Percival Glenroy Ullman. 8° cloth, 88 p. 3 pl. No date or place of publication.

EARLY HISTORY OF STATEN ISLAND<sup>12</sup>

This modest brochure bears several evidences of haste or carelessness in its preparation. On the cover the title appears as "A Short History of Staten Island"; but the title page designates the work as "Early History of Staten Island," while in his kindly letter of transmittal the author refers to it under the title first mentioned; so that the question is an open one in regard to the title under which it should be catalogued and cited.

It is fittingly dedicated to Mr. Ira K. Morris, "whose history of Staten Island has endeared him to all those who love Staten Island, and whose indefatigable and painstaking historical researches of many years have challenged the admiration of those interested in the history of our Island." This dedication is dated May 1918, which we may, therefore, assume to be approximately the date of publication, although it does not appear on the title page.

The author states, in the introduction, that "the desire to awaken in the hearts of the growing generations of Staten Islanders an interest and a love for their native island have induced the writer to present this short history."

It is, frankly, a compilation of such events and incidents, gleaned from general sources of information, as the author deemed to be of special interest or significance. It is unfortunate, however, that dates are omitted in connection with many events of importance, thus detracting from their main historic value and interest. The absence of pagination numbers is also a drawback, so far as ease and accuracy of reference and citation is concerned.

A. H.

<sup>12</sup> Early | History | of | Staten Island | By | Cornelius G. Kolff. 8° pamph. 32 p. May 1918(?).







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